DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 194 645 UD 020 731

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TITLE An Inquiry into Public Education in New York City: It's the System, Not the Teachers.
PUB DATE [80]
NOTE 50p.: Prepared through the Committee for Better Schools, New York, NY.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Change; *Educational Needs; Educational Quality; Elementary Education; *Health Needs; Public Schools; *Public School Teachers; School Districts; *Teacher Attitudes; Urban Schools; *Visual Impairments
IDENTIFIERS New York (New York)

ABSTRACT

This paper summarizes discussions that took place twice weekly between January 1979 and March 1980 among five teachers and an educational psychologist from New York City elementary schools, and an educational researcher. The purpose of the discussions was to find out what the participants considered to be the major educational problems, and what suggestions they had for changes. Student health needs were discussed, as well as educational issues such as screening, child development, behavior problems, books and materials, in-grade continuity for teachers, exchange of information by teachers, lesson plans, reading problems, learning innovations, professional assistance, class size, and the role of principals, parents, and teachers. Problems in bilingual education were stressed, and recommendations for change were made. Vision problems in New York City elementary schools are discussed in the appendix. (MK)

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# An Inquiry Into Public Education in New York City

## IT'S THE SYSTEM, NOT THE TEACHERS

by

Richard Greenspan

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## INTRODUCTION

Attack.

Attack.

Attack.

For 15 years now New York City's teachers, together with those in many other urban centers, have been under constant attack as the cause of widely publicized educational problems. When New York City reading scores were published in 1979, the caption blazoned across an entire page of the city's most widely circulated newspaper read: BLUSH AT READING SCORES, QUESTION THE TEACHING. (N.Y. Daily News, March 8, 1979.)

These attacks against teachers continue to increase as the American public loses confidence in their schools. Teachers and public education are all the more vulnerable because of the well-financed failures to find viable ways to appreciably improve the educational process.

The stance of many teachers is that the public isn't fully aware that the conditions under which teachers have to work seriously hinder their efforts; that the "system is bad. It is the "system" in the schools, many maintain, which is responsible for teacher "burnout" and disillusionment. Mental fatigue, anxiety, depression, anger, even physical ailments are some of the symptoms of teacher "burnout," reported a N.Y. Times (January 7, 1979) article on this phenomenon. Further, one third

of the nation's teachers, according to a National Education Association survey, would not enter teaching if they were beginning their careers again. (N.Y. Times, July 6, 1979) In New York City, only 2,400 of 9,000 teachers (27%--or one of four) laid off in the 1977-78 school year during the city's fiscal crisis returned when offered the opportunity. (N.Y. Times, January 9, 1979)

The despair of the teachers with the problems of public education is met with the despair of the public. "Many New Yorkers have given up on the public schools" writes David Seeley of the Public Education Association[1], in discussing the views of how the person at the top of the system, the Chancellor, would improve education.

In contrast, this paper essentially presents the in-depth views of a number of persons who work inside the schools, as to some of the major problems in the system and the changes they feel are essential if any significant improvement is to take place.

Six persons who work in the schools and this writer were involved in the discussions on which this paper is based. Five of the six have been classroom teachers from 5 to 22 years; the sixth is an educational psychologist. Five have one or two Masters Degrees in various areas of education and educational psychology. The experience of all spans years of educating children of various social backgrounds: middle class, lower middle class and poor. The children they are teaching now are mostly from poverty areas. They are familiar not only with their own schools but, having been

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[1] "Winds of Change in New York City's Public Schools--Can Chancellor Macciarola Set a New Course," City Almanac, February 1979, New School for Social Research.

in the school system over the years, have knowledge of the opinions of professionals in other schools as well. My background is that of an applied researcher in public education for the past 12 years.

Most of the discussions which took place were in the form of "brainstorming" sessions, of about two hours. When some particularly complex issues came up, they were handled as follows:

1. I would either suggest one or two of the group write a "position paper" on the issue or I would write down the gist of what we had discussed to be taken up at the next session.

2. A copy of this written material would be sent to each of the group before the next session.

3. A part of the next session was usually devoted to discussing the written material and changing it where necessary.

I was able to find supporting documentation on some of the issues taken up and have included those in this paper.

We met about twice a week from January 1979 to March 1980, except during the summer. The group used some sessions to check two drafts of this paper. Sometimes, when seeing their views written up made them realize more clarity was needed, more brainstorming sessions were held to get it.

None of the "brainstorming" took place during working hours, nor were the participants paid. The donation of these extra hours was based on the hope that their efforts would help to improve schools. "Thousands of teachers devote extra hours to help pupils," they pointed out.

Two things helped to assure the full and unguarded participation of the group. One was that no supervisors were present and the second, that

none of their names were to be published in this paper. This was to guard against possible punitive action being taken against them by the school system. "The politics of public schools," said one of the group, "is such that the system too often makes life difficult for those who speak out." However, despite the real-life possibility of punitive action being taken against them, three of the six said that if, after this paper were published, and there were need for them to speak publicly on their views as expressed in this paper they would be prepared to do so. One of these three gave this as her reason: "Everyone who works inside the schools knows how the system works against the children and the teachers. It's the public that doesn't know what's going on. They have got to be told."

The six are referred to in this paper as either "teachers," "group," "professionals," or "educators."

## HEALTH AND EDUCATION

I had come to the group with the idea of finding out what they considered to be the major educational problems in the elementary schools and what positive suggestions they had for changes. Frankly, I had expected we would immediately plunge into a discussion of specific educational issues, reading, math, etc. The group, however, felt that any fruitful discussion should begin with health needs. They felt that many children were unable to perform adequately in school because of problems with vision, speech, hearing, dental care and other health needs, and that these were not receiving proper attention.

### Vision Problems

We focused on vision when several of the teachers reported that as many as a fifth of the children in many of the classes in the schools they had contact with had serious vision problems. After checking with medical people who had done research in schools, I felt safe in estimating that approximately 36,000 pupils in New York City elementary schools have serious vision problems and wrote the following:

> In New York city, thousands upon thousands of children sit in the classroom and are unable to see what the teacher is writing on the board, and may have trouble reading, because of poor eyesight, or suffer headaches and other severe pain and trauma. This is a situation which has existed in the city public schools for years, and continues to exist.

This paragraph is found in Appendix I (pp.42-46 ) at the beginning of our detailed discussion and documentation of vision problems in public schools.

A draft of this paper was completed in August, 1979 and made available to the Regent's New York City Project (referred to as the Regent's Project hereafter), set up two years ago to work on improving education in the city.

On November 14th, 1979, the Regent's Project issued a scathing indictment of the handling of health problems in the city's public schools. They concluded that "health service for the schools has grown worse over recent years and has reached a level that can only be characterized as shocking," and that "an adequate program of school health service is one of the necessary conditions of an effective education program." (Their emphasis.)[2]

A salient paragraph of the Regent's Project report stated:

> There is evidence that suggests that the disturbingly high number of students who enter high-schools as non-readers may derive in part from the thousands of children who sit in classrooms unable to see what their teacher is writing on the board. It is very likely that learning in school is equally affected by many other health problems that remain undetected and uncorrected.

In recognition of the above, the State Board of Regents proposed the development of a system under which most physical examinations, immunizations, and vision and hearing tests would be performed on school sites by visiting medical teams from outside medical facilities, on a part-time basis.

The State Board of Regents backed the Regent's New York City Project's proposal to start a one-year pilot project along those lines in about twelve schools, and was reported as being of the opinion that "eventually similar programs should be opened in all schools throughout the state." (N.Y. Times, November 15, 1979) The Regent's Project report itself indicated

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[2] "A Plan for a Pilot Project in School Health Service in the Public Schools of New York City."

plans for the pilot project were well on its way, and had received firm support by Chancellor Machiarrolla.

This new orientation to school health by state and city education bodies, while welcome, is an obviously inadequate response to the overall health needs of the children in the city's other 30 school districts, and doesn't begin to provide for "the thousands of children who sit in classrooms unable to se what their teacher is writing on the board." The failure of the Regents, and the Chancellor, to propose and fight for a more comprehensive attack on the schools' health problems illustrates how badly the "system" is working for the children and their classroom teachers.

Significantly, the same kinds of health problems identified by the group involved in this report were similarly identified in the Regent's Project report, which in fact appears to have paraphrased some of the language on vision in the August 1979 draft of this report, which had been made available to them with the hope it would help their efforts. "We could have told the Regents years ago how badly health has been handled in the schools," said one of our teachers. "Why have they waited so long to find these things out?" *

The group, having discussed and lamented the state of health in the public schools, went on to consider problems involving the system and direct educational issues.

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*ON APRIL 15, 1980, WE WERE INFORMED THAT THE SMALL PILOT PROJECT, SCHEDULED TO START FEBRUARY, 1980, HADN'T GOTTEN OFF THE GROUND. THE STATE WOULDN'T ALLOW MEDICAID FUNDS TO BE USED, AS HAD BEEN HOPED FOR. OTHER FUNDS WERE STILL BEING SOUGHT.

## EDUCATIONAL ISSUES

Books and Materials, Continuity in Grade for Teachers, Continuity and Children's Learning Styles, Exchange of Information by Teachers, Screening, Child Development and Behavior, Lesson Plans, Reading, Remediation, Criticism of Mastery Learning Innovation, Principals, Parents and Teachers, Class Size, Almost Total Lack of Supervision in Schools, Bilingual Education

There is, said our group of professionals, no great mystery about how to educate each and every child who goes to elementary school. There is enough information, expertise and materials, the teachers said, about how to diagnose the specific problems of each child in learning and behavior. This available knowledge and expertise extends to the second essential educational area--prescription: that is, what must be done. And third, there is enough expertise around to handle the application part--doing what has to be done. The problem, the group felt, was that the available knowledge is not sufficiently put to use. This echoes the Committee for Economic Development's point that the prime problem in governmental ineffectiveness is not lack of knowledge or technology but lack of will to put into effect what is known. ("Improving Productivity of State and Local Government," New York, 1976.)

These three areas--diagnosis, prescription and application, are the keys to the proper education of a child--and it is what the classroom teacher is involved with in handling the many hundreds and thousands of elements which go into educating a child. This is the process that goes on constantly in the classroom, with seemingly simple

things like teaching a class of children the letters of the alphabet, the meaning of whole words and sentences, or the principles of addition, subtraction, multiplication, etc., etc.

The complexity of all this for the teacher is that some children learn better visually, some learn better tactilely, some learn better auditorilly, and some use various combinations of these three modes. In addition to these educational issues, there are the health problems previously referred to which might make it more difficult for children to learn, and then there are also the very important emotional issues involved in teaching children. Often children are worried about problems at home, and teachers have to try to understand this and attempt to deal with the special learning problems involved-- while they are attempting to teach a class full of children. One group, headed by Professors Seymour B. Sarason of Yale and William C. Morse of the University of Michigan and this writer, states that "teaching groups of children varying dramatically in ability, motivation, background and personality, is as difficult a task as any human being can engage in."[3]

How the New York City system impedes the teacher in carrying out "a task as difficult as any human being can engage in" and what the system might do to improve the effectiveness of the teachers was spelled out in discussions of education areas taken up below.

## SCREENING

While informal screening of the individual child takes place continually during the child's schooling, there are formal screening programs

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[3]Statement of Purposes, National Council on Assistance to the Classroom Teachers, 1974.

which the group felt could be particularly helpful when a child begins school. In addition to identifying the strengths and weaknesses of children placed in regular classrooms, selected screening programs would help to identify early in their school years those children with special needs, the handicapped, etc., and start the process of fulfilling those special needs which have been formally identified and recorded.

The group proposed--for the purpose of continuity--that all screening information be included in his/her records when the child is transferred to another school or teacher. The group recognized the danger of using formal screening instruments, which might stigmatize the child and/or confuse a teacher. Some teachers would need help in understanding the screening results and reassessing as the child develops and changes over time. However, the group felt that positives outweighed negatives, particularly in the use of screening for Kindergarten and Grade I. They emphasized the positive values of screening, especially for new teachers. They felt the small amount of time needed for such screening, about 45 minutes per child, was well worth it.

The group then asked two of its members to write a memo on screening which the whole group then edited. That edited version is reproduced below.

SCREENING AND EARLY IDENTIFICATION

1. It is recommended that all kindergarten children and those who enter school in the first grade be screened to identify special educational needs and to determine learning styles.

2. Once the individual child's assets and deficits are determined, it is necessary to determine intervention techniques and educational goals.

3. Also to be identified are those children who need further evaluation by a doctor, psychologist or speech and language therapist or possible referral to the Committee on the Handicapped for special education placement.

4. Screening can suggest the long and short term individual and educational goals to be established and should become a part of the cumulative record, which should follow the child through school, and in the event of a change of schools, to his/her new school.

5. Each of the screening programs have accompanying intervention programs for the possible remediation of the identified weakness. These programs require little training to administer, do not take excessive time and are relatively easy to interpret. Any one of the many good commercially available screening programs used consistently by even an inexperienced teacher might be able to provide the child with the essential skills basic to learning.

6. A plan for each child can be developed through proper screening, and should state strong and weak learning modalities so that plans could be developed to teach through the child's strength while remediating weaknesses. Long range goals would include:

Reading Skills
Language Skills
Math Skills
Psychomotor development
Social adaptation

7. Short term goals would divide these areas into small mastery units with time limits for the attainment of specific skills. These goals should be reviewed twice yearly and revised according to need.

8. A support or helping teacher should be available to help the classroom teacher implement the plans and be a resource for classroom management and learning activities, including better use of paraprofessionals. This resource teacher should be familiar with the children in the program and should meet frequently with the class teacher as well as work in the classroom.

## BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT

The group said that while emphasis is properly placed on deepening teachers' understanding of subject matter, and that while screening could be a valuable instrument, greater comprehension of child development is extremely important in connection with those two areas.

Needed, they stressed, is a practical understanding of child development by teachers, particularly in relation to the maturational process, i.e., that children develop at different levels and speeds in different areas depending on their intrinsic characteristics, developmental inclinations, and environmental circumstances. Frequently, children are asked by teachers to do things they are not ready for developmentally. As a result, both teachers and children feel frustrated and inadequate. Part of this problem arises because teachers are given materials which may be too advanced or too simple for some pupils. A broader knowledge of child development will enable teachers to evaluate, select and develop materials appropriate to the level of development of the children in their classrooms.

For more teachers to acquire this broader practical knowledge of child development, the group agreed, there is a need for a program which will provide professional on-the-job assistance to the classroom teacher faced with specific problems in a specific classroom.

Behavior Problems in Classroom

In discussing behavior problems encountered by teachers in the classroom, the group said that there was a need to provide better on-the-job training to teachers in this area and that it was the lack of training which made it difficult to cope with disrupting children. The result too often has been unnecessary disruption of class time, and sometimes unnecessary disciplinary action against a child.

Alfred Block, in the oft-quoted paper on teacher "Combat Fatigue,"[4] made a salient point along these lines that has largely been ignored. He

[4]Alfred M. Bloch, "Combat Neurosis in Inner-City Schools," Paper presented at the 130th meeting of the American Psychiatric Association, May 4, 1977.

suggested the use of mental health teams (two teachers trained in mental health supervised by a psychiatrist or a psychologist) which would help teachers with acting-out students. One of the approaches suggested was developing the understanding in teachers that the provocative games students play, when skillfully handled, can result in shared jokes and improved morale. But when "poorly handled, the results can be catastrophic." Our group felt a helping teacher, trained in mental health, might be a more economic substitute for a mental health team.

## BOOKS AND MATERIALS

Given the vital need in the classroom for the timely provision of appropriate books and materials, the group said, the "system" in New York City public schools in this area was generally "terrible," and worked against the teachers' efforts. Three major complaints were registered:

1. Teachers often are forced to use materials inappropriate to their needs.

2. There is no adquate continuity in the materials they must often use. Some subjects are carried over a number of years. What teachers needed and often weren't getting was continuity over the years. "A series which covers three or more years may not be accessible to all children in a school for that many years." one of the group said. "And this happens in many subject areas.

3. They often have to wait a long time to receive materials they do order, sometimes a wait as long as a year by which time the teacher has a different class and may need different materials.

Urged by the professionals was a sharply critical look at the way books and materials are selected. They urged improved selection policies. One important step, they felt, would be for teachers to have a greater voice in selection. The group said that there are many useful materials but they don't get them when they need them. One of the results is that teachers

often spend many hours after school developing their own materials. While it is necessary to develop materials for some special individual or group needs, doing it for an entire class in various subjects is a misuse of teachers' time and energy.

One of the group members made this statement which captures the essence of teachers' problems in acquiring materials:

> Look, the content in the curriculum bulletins put out by the Central Board of Education is some of the finest in the country. The problem is between theory and practice. The Board isn't there to help in the application.
>
> Example. I was a science teacher in a K-6 enrichment program, I used the curriculum bulletins--but there was no material available through the Central Board, the district, or the school to carry out that bulletin.
>
> I had to spend huge amounts of time and my own money, about $1,000, to get materials in order to carry out the Board's Curriculum Bulletins. Afternoons, evenings, weekends, summertime, going to corporations asking for donations of materials, speaking to friends who were familiar with subjects taught in schools outside the city and asking teachers in different areas on the Island, (Long Island) or Upstate who had supplies to "acquire some." I call this "liberating" material; others call it "white collar crime." Some of the material is expendable and consumable. Other material is ripped off. I constantly had to replenish my material. In many schools, to this day, the right materials aren't available and inappropriate materials are ordered. This is true in science, true in math, true in every subject. Materials are hard to come by.

## CONTINUITY IN GRADE FOR TEACHERS

"If you see a teacher running around like crazy, tense and excitable all the time, it's probably a teacher assigned a class in a different grade. She/he must be consumed with the work morning, noon and night and weekends to try to stay on top of all the new material to be taught," said one of the group.

How the "system" works against such a teacher, is seen in a verbatim report by one of the group:

> A teacher who has been dealing with four year olds and shifted to six or seven year olds, will need a year to understand the children's abilities and developmental levels in the new grade.
>
> Developmentally, for example, a teacher will have a six year old who has a problem reversing "b" and "d." The teacher might think something is wrong with the child and put pressure on him, making him feel inadequate and demoralized. I, as a reading specialist, could point out that reversals, like these, are common among six year olds--but that if it happened in 5th or 6th grade that would be a serious problem.
>
> The best thing would be for teachers to remain in a grade if they want to, but if shifted to another grade, adequate help should be given them to understand the children and the curriculum and how to apply it.
>
> In fourth grade, you have a lot of reading to do--you have science, you have math, language arts, reading, social studies, health, physical education, art, music. How does a teacher know what abilities each child brings to each of those areas? He/she has to know each of those areas for that level of child.
>
> The current system basically shuts the door on that teacher and she/he has to learn all about this him/herself. All the teacher knows from previous cumulative record cards is that each child is excellent, good, fair or unsatisfactory in these areas. This doesn't reveal enough of what the teacher needs to know: what a child knows in the subjects, and the strengths and weakness in her/his ability to learn.

## EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION BY TEACHERS

What about the knowledge the previous teachers have about these children and is it transmitted? This was the reply given.

> Remember that some children come from the same school and others were in different schools the year before. In the same school, there is no systematic and organized procedure for the transmission of information from one teacher to another; no time is allotted for transmission of this information. At present it is done on a very sporadic and individual basis with already busy teachers trying to nab each other at lunch, on free periods or after school.

Our professionals suggest that special times be set aside for the transmission of this information. This might take the form of setting one or two days aside for exchange of information. However, they emphasized that the child's current teacher be aware of possible faulty judgment or bias on the part of the previous teacher.

In regard to those children who come from other schools, the group suggested that written information be transmitted along with the child's records. They recognized a serious problem in transmitting written information, an issue discussed earlier on screening. The child's new teacher could be negatively influenced by these reports, especially if they stress the child's weaknesses and do not identify areas of strengths and interest. The group said that the positives should outweigh the negatives, and that available supervisors or resource teachers could help to minimize this problem by assisting teachers in interpreting records, test scores, screening devices, etc.

## COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE LESSON PLANS

Most of the teaching and learning which goes on in the classroom, hour by hour, subject by subject, concept by concept, is mapped out by the teacher in a lesson plan.

The current lesson plan format which teachers follow and submit to their supervisors weekly, our specialists state, is inadequate. The main reason for the inadequacy is that the lesson plan format, as practiced, provides almost solely for teaching a lesson to the class in one way and is not geared to the special educational needs of the different groups within each class. Said one professional: "What's the use of having a diagnosis that tells us, for example, that you have five groups of children who learn in

different ways and your plans, in line with the format which you must hand in, provides for teaching to all in one way, or through one concept, when five approaches should be taught to the five groups?"

One of the group said she handed in her "canned" lesson plan weekly from year to year solely to satisfy what her AP insisted on, because the "system" required it, and then went on to draw up her more logical lesson plans to deal with the different learning patterns of the individual children in her class. Teachers, as are supervisors, are rated partly on the quality of the lesson plan handed in under the present format which has not changed much in 50 years and which comes from the Central Board of Education. Five of the six group members felt that changing the lesson plan format was an important necessary systematic change.

## READING

The many problems of the New York City public schools are reflected in the specific area of reading, so that by the time many students get to high school they are unable to keep up with their course work because of poor reading skills. Hundreds of thousands of students in the schools are found two or more years below grade level in reading. The full and horrifying impact of the reading problem was brought home to this writer when examining the official reading scores of ninth graders in a poverty area high school for the Flesichmann Commission in the early 1970's. Out of 250 pupils, 125--50%--were found to be five or more years below grade level in reading!

Our group held a number of discussions on what were the problems in improving reading in elementary schools. The discussions covered the teaching of reading in the regular classroom, in remediation classes, and in special reading programs.

Teaching Reading in the Regular Classroom

One of the basic problems is that teachers haven't been trained and aren't being trained to teach reading in regular classrooms. The group felt strongly that neither reading courses in colleges nor inservice reading courses and workshops, were sufficient training. Many teachers, they felt, could be taught to improve their teaching of reading by use of in-classroom assistance to teachers by reading specialists.

Remediation: Collaboration With Regular Classroom Teachers

The group, a number of whom are reading specialists, stressed the need to link remediation outside the regular classroom, often called "pull-out" classes, with reading instruction inside the classroom. For example, the regular classroom teachers often give students attending outside remediation programs classroom assignments which they are totally unable to do. At the same time, pull-out remedial teachers are often unaware of the on-going units of study in the regular classroom. The pull-out programs often fail to incorporate skill areas which the child might well be able to handle if instruction were individualized. Clearly, closer communication and collaboration between regular classroom teachers and remedial teachers must take place if remedial efforts are to impact on a learner's total educational program.

The group also reported that too many remedial teachers are inadequately trained in the special remedial reading techniques that would permit them to help children overcome their specific reading problems.

The conclusions of the group in relation to reading remediation were made in April, 1979. A few months later, officials of the New York City Board of Education and the New York State Department indicated great

dissatisfaction with remediation programs throughout the city and state, according to a N. Y. Times article (June 13, 1979). The Times summed up their opinions that "while (remediation) programs in some individual districts were effective, many others were haphazardly planned, inadequately monitored, insufficiently evaluated and often unrelated to what youngsters were supposed to be learning in their regular classrooms." The article also reported that youngsters were sent for remediation to teachers who were not certified to teach reading.

The point must be made here that our group of "insiders" and many other "insiders," had seen first-hand for years how faulty these remediation programs have been, and yet their views had not been sought out in all that time.

Criticism of Major New Learning Innovation

The group was particularly strong in its criticism of a major "innovative" effort involving the mastery learning approach. They felt that here was a current specific example of how education could be improved by consulting with teachers before and not after instituting programs that were supposed to help teachers.

The group felt the mastery learning approach was wasteful in terms of teacher time and energy, and categorized it as another unsuccessful attempt to use computers rather than teachers: "Somebody's making a lot of money out of this" said a reading specialist in the group. The group's criticism of the mastery learning approach as applied to the lower grades is as follows:

"The use of mastery learning approach involves the use of criterion reference tests that are constructed in a rigid fashion that does not reflect the true abilities and needs of a student. For example, in reading, computer

print-outs itemize those phonic skills which the child supposedly knows, needs to learn or review, and lists those comprehension skills in these categories. However, since only two items per skill are included in the test, it is difficult to ascertain the validity of the test. Moreover, the phonics skills tested are not necessarily those which, if taught, will provide the child with all of the skills necessary for reading. Learning discrete parts of the reading decoding processes through phonics may help some children, but misses helping many. In fact, a child may be able to identify every item -- obtain a mastery score on the test--and still not be able to read. It is also possible for a child to know all of the sounds and not be able to blend them to form words. She/he may also be able to decode the words on the criterion reference test, but not be able to comprehend the sense of what she/he has read. Also, the tests presume that children learn in an orderly fashion. That just isn't so. Many do not learn in the same sequential order but rather cross vertically and horizontially. Nor does the test help the teacher to understand whether a child learns visually, auditorilly or tactilely, or through some combination of these modes. Furthermore, the test gives the teacher no clue as to the different speeds at which a child learns.

"For a minority of children, especially those who learn sequentially and phonetically, this test can be of some use. In the case of these children, however, the regular reading programs are adequate. The tests do inform teachers about which parts of the discrete reading process, or words, the child is unfamiliar with. But these computerized tests, and the extra work they make for the teacher are not worth the money or the effort. A Teacher or reading specialist can find out about a child's weaknesses in reading and can do it in a few minutes with a simple pencil test which will provide much more information to the teacher than the criterion reference tests.

"Many teachers have told us mastery learning is more a hinderance than a help. We urge immediate research on mastery learning (on which there have been no major national studies--N.Y. Times, 3/30/80), and feel such research will sustain our views."

"Remember," said one of the group, "teachers said Teaching machines wouldn't work and they didn't. The same will happen with mastery learning."

## CONTINUITY IN READING

The group went on to discuss problems of continuity in the teaching and learning of reading, which they felt the system should, but hadn't, tackled. Their reasoning and approach was as follows:

1. Consideration should be given to the fact that children have different styles of learning how to read.

2. Once a style has been identified, special steps should be taken to insure continuity of learning in that style.

3. Because of the constant shift of population, particularly in low socio-economic areas, special steps which might be considered are: a) appealing to parents not to move outside the school district of the particular school during the first four years of school, b) that if a move is made, every attempt be made to place a child in a particular school where the child can receive reading instruction which is compatible with his/her reading style. Some type of city-wide planning to make this possible was suggested.

Another set of suggestions the professionals made was designed to help absentees learn what they missed and provide help to other children who simply did not learn something the first time it was presented. Some teachers were able to do this with some children during their lunch hour,

during their free periods or after school. Paraprofessionals have also been used effectively for this purpose. But they said the provision for helping absentees make up missed material still constitutes a large problem in public schools. They said they felt that the many nonclassroom professional personnel involved in special programs outside many of the schools might have this as part of their assignment.

Study Substantiated In-Classroom Help Produces Significant Reading Improvement

The validity of the group emphasis on the need to have reading specialists, or helping teachers trained in reading, work with the classroom teacher was substantiated by Albert J. Harris,[5] in a longitudinal research study considered very highly in reading circles. The Harris work, called the CRAFT Project, produced significant findings that in-classroom help to teachers improves the children's reading ability.

The CRAFT Project was a five year follow-up research effort involving over 1,000 children in poverty-area schools. The original purpose of the CRAFT study was to compare four types of reading methods (Basic Reader, Phono-visual, Language Experience, Language-Experience-Visual).

Although Harris found no significant differences in the comparative effectiveness of the four reading methods, the pupils made significant reading progress due to the direct assistance by reading consultants, who observed the teachers in the classroom and then reported their observations to the teachers.

"The major conclusion to be drawn from the results is that the teacher is far more important than the method. Assistance provided by consultants

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[5]Albert J. Harris, et al., A Continuation of the Craft Project, Comparing Reading Approaches with Disadvantaged Urban Children in Primary Grades. Divison of Teacher Education, CUNY, New York, N.Y., January 1968. Project No. 5-0570 -2-12-1; Contract No. OE-6-10-063. Office of Education, U.S. Department of HEW.

who were perceived as helpers rather than as supervisors was probably the main reason for the favorable results obtained in all of the methods." (Emphasis added)

Harris also related reading to other subjects. He suggested that improving reading is far from being only a question of how a teacher handles the teaching of reading itself, but rather how effective the teacher is in recognizing individual and group needs and in fitting the difficulty of material in other subjects "to the reading skills of the children."

The Critical Need for In-Classroom Professional Assistance

Harris's important contribution about in-classroom help to the teacher being of vital importance in the area of reading, the subject of his study, was extended by our group of professionals to all aspects of the teacher's work in the classroom.

"We have got to get real professionals, who know what it is to teach in a classroom of children, to be available to assist teachers along the wide range of educational and behavioral areas which face them every day" said one of the group. "This is basic to improving the effectiveness of teachers not only in reading, but in all other subjects."

What is being discussed here is simply the need of teachers for helpful technical supervision by a professional educator--something which amazingly rarely exists in New York City elementary schools.

The things such a helping professional educator would be expected to do were delineated in the discussion above on screening.

> A helping teacher should be available to help the classroom teacher implement plans and be a resource for classroom management and learning activities including better use of paraprofessionals. This helping teacher should be familiar with the children in the program and should meet frequently with the classroom teacher as well as work in the classroom

One Project's Help to Teachers

In recent years there has been increasing discussion as well as pilot projects delineating how such professionals help teachers. One such program, where these professional educators were called "advisors," detailed the help provided to teachers:[6]

--teacher receives advice on specific problems (e.g., how to handle a particular child, how to "revitalize" an area in the room)

--teacher receives new ideas for instructional activity

--show teacher how to work with children

--determines teacher's needs and points out next steps

--works with children in the classroom

--explains to teacher reasons for specific actions with children

--teacher infers general principles or patterns of new behavior by observing the advisor interact with children over materials or with other teachers over classroom or school issues

--teacher gains insights from a thoughtful analysis of the classroom provided by an observer whom the teacher judges knowledgable and understanding

--in-depth discussion with advisor leads to new ideas or insights

--stimulates new efforts and ways of doing things on teacher's part (e.g., keeping anecdotal records and analyzing samples of children's work)

--helps teacher make materials

--works with children in the corridor or in the resource room

--acts as buffer with administration in settling problems (e.g., custodial complaints).

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[6]See Anne M. Bussis, Edward A. Chittenden and Marianne Amarel, Beyond Surface Curriculum. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1976, p. 157.

Models for Professional Help to Teachers

A view of a helping teacher approach, which answers many questions as to how such programs should be designed, on what basis helping teachers should be selected, and how they should operate in schools, is provided in Columbia University's Teacher's College Record, (September, 1978)[7] by Pauline S. Rauh of Stamford, Connecticut public schools, who worked in such a program for four years.

Ms. Rauh writes of the importance of a helping teacher program "to assist teachers in their efforts to individualize (personalize, humanize, etc.) instruction." She was startled at how a notice of her availability to provide assistance to teachers was received: "Teachers were willing to meet before school and stay after school (not to mention giving up their prep periods and/or lunches) . . . Teachers found this help, based on what was going on in their workplace, far more satisfying than the general workshops and seminars typical of most teacher training in public schools."

There are other models. They include William C. Morse's Helping Teacher model in Michigan, the Clinical Supervisor model developed by Morris L. Cogan of the University of Pittsburgh. Bank Street College's Follow Through program also includes solid on-the-job help to classroom teachers.

What about principals being able to do the Helping Teacher's work? The reply from one participant, agreed to by others, was: "We'd be kidding ourselves. Good principals are very important in a school: they are vital in organizing a teacher support system, but they don't have enough time to work closely with teachers, even though many are workaholics. Most principals rarely come into the classroom. And when they come, it's to see if things are orderly and neat. Most assistant principals are concerned

[7] "Helping Teacher: A Model for Staff Development"

with discipline and take care of a lot of the mechanics of running a school.

Sarason, after 10 years of studying schools made this point about principals and specialists, which would include Helping Teachers: "Specialists are a constant reminder that regular school personnel, including the principal, cannot do the job themselves."[8]

"One of Great Hidden Issues in Education"

David Seeley, Director of the Public Education Association, states that, "one of the great hidden issues of American education" is the need for providing assistance to the classroom teachers. Seeley, in a speech made to the Education Writers Association, April 6, 1979 expounded on this theme as follows:

> We must find ways to provide more assistance to classroom teachers. Principals can be expected to improve teaching by setting the right tone in a building, by helping the staff maintain a sense of their educational mission, and by leadership in wedding together positive forces and fending off negative ones. But for a variety of reasons principals themselves need help in providing direct assistance to the classroom teachers to improve their instructional performance.
>
> This again is one of the great hidden issues of American education. Talk to principals and superintendents and they will stress how the supervision of teaching is one of their prime functions. Talk to teachers and they will tell you how little help they get. Teaching is one of the most isolated and unsupported professional functions in our society. Doctors, lawyers, engineers, army officers, and almost any profession you can think of provides the opportunity for professional consultation and mutual help in performing professional functions. Teachers, by and large, are left alone in their classrooms to sink or swim--to find professionally effective strategies, or to find survival strategies that may kill learning, and do untold damage to children.
>
> Teachers need help. But they are afraid to ask for it. And principals are afraid to admit that they cannot provide it.
>
> The National Council on Assistance to Classroom Teachers, a small but dedicated group of educators, has recognized this problem for some years and has been advocating a way to remedy it. Their main

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[8]Seymour B. Sarason, The Culture of the School and the Problem of Change, Allyn and Bacon, 1971, p. 127.

> suggestion is to provide teachers with professional help that is not part of the official accountability chain. The experienced teaching consultant can apply his or her expertise directly to the problems that a teacher is having rather than to abstractions which might be discussed in college classrooms. They can help not only with pedagogical technique and curriculum but with relationships between teachers and students, which often turn out to be at the heart of ineffective teaching and learning.
>
> This is particularly useful in urban schools, where many teachers find that a teaching style which might be satisfactory in some schools is ineffective or even destructive in others."

Seeley's emphasis on provision of direct assistance to classroom teachers may prove to represent an important qualititative change in efforts to find more positive solutions by New York City civic leaders.

## HELPING PRINCIPALS TO IMPROVE

Principals, the group agreed, made a big difference in schools. But since the good, bad, and indifferent ones were going to be in those schools for years to come--and even those appointed under a different selection system might prove to be imperfect--the problem was how to improve the performance of principals once on the job.

The group felt that some of the recommended systemic changes and the concept of the Helping Teacher would help improve the effectiveness of principals.

The National Council on Assistance to Classroom Teachers urges programs which would help improve the functioning of those on the job now. Such programs, which would provide for on-the-job assistance to principals, have been in existence over the years. They include the consultation services provided to school principals by Community Mental Health Centers in New York City and other agencies.

Most of this assisting involves one-to-one working with principals, as against the idea of having group leadership courses for principals, an

effort which has produced few results over the years. One well-known former New York City District Superintendent, Elliott Shapiro, tried to improve leadership by principals by working with them in groups, and discovered it was the wrong approach. Trying to work with principals as a group "was a fundamental mistake," Shapiro was quoted as saying in relation to one attempt he made. "I should have worked with them one by one, on a counseling basis." But, Shapiro is quoted as then saying, he didn't have the time because of his many daily crises.[9]

One suggestion this writer makes is that more applied research should be done on how to improve the work of principals. A problem needing such research is the amount of work imposed on principals by the higher echelons--the Central Board and the districts--which is unnecessary or of low priority. One principal I met in Manhattan, when I spoke to a PTA group in January 1979, told me that he came in every morning at 7 to attempt to get his work done, but that his work was constantly being increased by the District Office and the Central Board.

The inadequate steps taken to find improved ways to assist teachers and principals represents, in this writer's opinion, the most profound "systemic" problem in New York City schools.

## PARENTS AND TEACHERS

All of our group felt that the "system" should be doing much more about effecting improved relationships between parents and school personnel. Bringing about closer relationships between parents and teachers is not as easy as it would seem, they stressed.

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[9]Nat Hentoff, Does Anybody Give a Damn? Nat Hentoff on Education. New York, Alfred A. Knopf. 1977, p. 213.

They came up with the following suggestions:

1. The "system" must recognize the need to train teachers and principals about how best to work with and relate to parents. In this respect, they felt, a Helping Teacher could be of great value in bringing parents, teachers and principals closer together.

2. The "system" should attempt to see that a teacher has more time to relate to parents.

3. The "system" should also attempt to educate parents about how best to relate to teachers and other school personnel.

Such measures, the group felt, would result in bringing into the educational process the talents and energies of many thousands of parents now being excluded from that process.

## CLASS SIZE

The city budget proposed for fiscal year 1980-1981, which takes effect July 1, 1980, calls for an increase in average class size from 29 to 31. This budget was proposed by Mayor Edward Koch, who doesn't think that smaller class size makes a difference in a child's ability to learn, according to an interview in the N.Y. Times (October 29, 1979), which quoted the Mayor as saying: "I know there are different points of view on that . . . But I came out pretty good, and I was in a classroom of 45."

Our group of professionals stressed the importance of the smallest possible classes as vital to the quality of public education. "Manageable class size--along with a system which doesn't hinder, but helps the classroom teacher--is needed if education in the city is to be improved" they agreed.

Handicapped Children and Class Size

The group also pointed out that the "average" class size of 29 is made up of regular classes and very small special classes for handicapped children of as few as 8 to 10 pupils. Such "averaging" by the system has produced many larger-size regular school classes of 35 and over. Increasing the "average" from 29 to 31 would make class size soar higher.

Recently, handicapped children have been "mainstreamed" adding to the teachers' difficulties in managing oversized classes. This is unfair to the teacher and especially the handicapped child who needs special assistance from the teacher that large size classes make exceedingly difficult.

## PROBLEMS IN BILINGUAL EDUCATION

The bilingual teacher who was a member of our group pointed out that in discussions of general programs in education, the special problems of bilingual programs were often left out. She was asked to submit a memorandum on this large and ever-growing part of the New York student population. A check with three other bilingual specialists found general agreement with the memo.

MEMORANDUM: ON BILINGUAL EDUCATION

FROM: A Bilingual Teacher

Although important progress has been made on the legal and educational front to attend to the special educational needs of an estimated 100,000 non-English speaking children, one constantly runs up against all types of resistance, problems and catch-22 situations in the school system that impede the effectiveness of bilingual education.

The legal ruling which led to the establishment of bilingual education in New York City was the August 1974 Aspira Consent Decree by Judge Marvin E. Frankel of the United States District Court. In his ruling, Judge Frankel pointed out that the decree was in accord with the unanimous opinion earlier that year of the U.S. Supreme Court that schools receiving federal aid must provide for the special needs of non-English speaking pupils.**

The Aspira complaint which led to the decree had pointed out what many in the school system had known for years--that placing non-English speaking children in English-speaking classes produced inadequate learning, lowered educational achievement and test scores, and poorer rates of promotion and graduation.

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*See Memorandum 72 Civ. 4002.

**In Lau vs. Nichols, 414, U.S. 563, January 21, 1974.

The Consent Decree mandated the implementation of bilingual programs for children who weren't adequately proficient in English, but who were much more proficient in Spanish. (Non-English speaking children other than Spanish-speaking also were to benefit from the Aspira Decree.)

These children were to have the opportunity to receive:

- intensive English as a Second Language Instruction
- subject matter courses in Spanish: mathematics, science, social studies
- reinforcement of Spanish language skills, important for the study of the above courses.

After the Decree, the Board of Education was to have the bilingual programs well started by September 1975, but dragged their feet--so much so that on October 22, 1976, Judge Frankel held the Board and Chancellor Irving Anker in contempt of court for "their failure to comply with the duties they assumed under the consent decree and implementing orders of the court." Since being held in contempt, the Board of Education has moved much faster in the testing of children for admission to bilingual programs, and in setting up the programs. I can say, on the basis of what I have seen in my five years as a bilingual teacher that children are generally happier in bilingual classes and that they are learning more than they would have had they been placed in English-speaking classes. In addition, the bilingual programs have brought much more cooperation from Spanish-speaking parents than before, much of it due to the fact that they can converse in Spanish with the teachers--which they were unable to do before.

But there are problems as elements within the system continue to put up various kinds of resistances and impediments. Here are some of the major ones I have observed:

1. Pupils Kept Out Illegally

Some children are unfairly kept out of bilingual classes by administrators. One of the ways this is done is by changing the scores on the tests so that children appear to know more English than they do. I know of cases where test results have been falsified this way.

2. Oversize Classes

Class sizes are much too large, even larger than many of the oversize English-speaking classes. I know of many classrooms where teachers work with as many as 38, 39 or even 40 children. This is a particularly bad situation because of the wide array of students' needs in many bilingual classes. Consider the following real-life mix in a bilingual intermediate class of 37 that I taught last year.

The class included six children who had never attended school in their own countries; a small group that had attended school only since arriving in New York, for an average of two years; a group of about ten children who were near or at grade level in most school subjects; five who were clearly above grade level in all areas but who spoke no English; three children who were awaiting placement in special education classes; and approximately five who had attended English monolingual classes through elementary school but had failed to acquire the most basic of reading and math skills.

In addition to the academic skills which had to be taught, these children had to adjust to a new climate, culture, language and lifestyle.

3. Too Many Grades in One Classroom

Given the difficulty of having to teach children with so many different needs in a bilingual class, one can understand that it is even more difficult when there is more than one grade in a class. The union contract forbids more than two grades to be put together in one class. Nevertheless a close friend

of mine is teaching three grades of bilingual children in one classroom. When she complained to the principal he said she could file an official complaint, but if she did she would lose her job.

4. Farcical Supervisory Set-Up

The supervisory set-up in bilingual programs is somewhat farcical. Many of the bilingual programs consist of a few bilingual classes in a regular school with mainly English-speaking principals and assistant principals who are responsible for supervising and evaluating classes not only in English, but in Spanish--which they don't understand.

Also, many of these supervisors do not understand the bilingual educational process: when to teach a child Spanish, when to teach a child English. There are some bilingual coordinators who are available to classroom teachers in some programs, and some teachers take advantage of their knowledge. But because they are not on supervisory lines, even though some have supervisory licenses, these coordinators, although they know the foreign language and the bilingual educational process, are not formally and sufficiently involved in the supervisory or the evaluation process.

5. Lack of Materials

I don't know what it's all about, but a principal in a school I worked in said I couldn't get regular school materials because they were bought with city tax-levy funds and that bilingual programs can only use materials purchased with special Federal and State funds. It doesn't sound fair to me.

6. Scarcity of Spanish-Speaking Resources

A serious continuing problem is finding Spanish-speaking resources where bilingual children can receive accurate hearing, speech, language, psychological and psychiatric tests. Many children with special problems are neglected for months, and even years, because of lack of this type of resource.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper has attempted to present the views of a small number of school professionals, five teachers and an educational psychologist, about major problems in education in the New York City elementary schools, and their ideas about effecting meaningful improvements. Some of the major problems they point to are:

. There are too many unattended health problems, vision a prime one. In too many classes, pupils are unable to see adequately. An estimate provided here is that there are 36,000 such pupils in the city's elementary schools.

. Materials and books are too often inadequate and inappropriate; some arrive days, weeks, or months after they are needed.

. There are serious deficiencies in the conduct of much-needed "pull-out" remediation programs, including lack of coordination with the regular classroom teacher, and insufficient training of remediation teachers.

. In many cases, lesson plan procedures are inadequate or inappropriate for classroom needs.

. A major "innovative" reading program used by many teachers based on mastery learning is held to be grossly inadequate and largely a waste of classroom time.

. There are serious problems in much-needed bilingual programs: classes are much too large, there is an inadequate supervisory system in which mostly English-speaking personnel are responsible for supervising teaching in the child's native language; some bilingual children are unfairly kept out of such classes.

The group's ideas on effecting meaningful improvements in elementary education include taking measures to correct the problems cited above, and also include the following constructive suggestions:

. Make more use of screening tests.

. Improve Reading by the use of specialists to work closely with the teacher in relation to education taking place in the classroom for continuity of the teaching of reading in early grades.

. Have a child's teacher pass on important information to the child's next teacher.

. Work more innovatively to improve relations between parents and teachers.

. Establish a technical assistance supervisory system for classroom teachers which works--such a system must be based on what's happening at the point of educational production--the classroom. The Helping Teacher or Master Teacher model, which relates to teachers' needs and problems in relation to the classroom, is suggested. This is important to raise teacher ability along a broad number of areas--the teaching of reading, math, etc., child development, behavior problems, relations between teachers, parents and schools, and with paraprofessionals.

. Develop better and more constructive measures to improve the effectiveness of the school principal.

None of the measures to improve teacher and principal competency imply that grossly incompetent teachers or principals should be permitted to remain within the system. But this is a small minority. The major problem is how to improve the work of the large majority--the "average" school teacher and principal.

The group of educators involved in this study felt strongly that positive action on the above criticism and suggestions would lay the basis for an effective support system--something they believe absolutely essential of significant improvement in public education is to take place.

It is appropriate to add here that I have found many academics in schools of education, who teach or work with classroom teachers, to be quite sensitive to their problems and needs. One of them, Dr. Luciana Steinzor, on the faculty of the Graduate Programs at the Bank Street College of Education, was asked to comment on this final draft. She did, as follows:

> Your teachers have described what is happening in the schools quite accurately. Many of my students are city teachers and have told me many of the same things. I agree with the stress placed on the vital need for an adequate support system. I would stress that an essential element in such a system would be the availability of on-site intensive professional assistance to the classroom teacher.

Industry Parallel

The synonym for intensive on-site professional assistance is quality supervision. This writer, having worked as a production manager in private industry for a decade, feels strongly that the quality results in any enterprise is largely dependent on the quality of the supervision at the point of production.* In New York City schools there is hardly any supervision at the point of educational production: the classroom. Supervisors are generally too occupied with necessary administrative duties to be able to devote the large amount of time that would be necessary to provide the intensive on-site supervisory assistance teachers need.

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*This is a common view among management specialists. See, for example, Peter F. Drucker, Management Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices. New York: Harper and Row, 1973.

Discussion

The material presented in this study, which illustrates the many ways in which the efforts of the classroom teacher are hindered and frustrated by the system under which the schools are run, points to the root cause of the poor quality of education in the elementary schools as being the system, not the teachers.

This suggests the obvious need for those who control the system to examine what systemic changes must be made so that the classroom teachers can become more effective in their work. Otherwise we will continue wasting the talents of the city's 20,000-plus elementary school teachers. While part of such an examination must, of necessity, examine many more aspects of the "system" than have been examined in this study, I, and our group of educators, felt the changes suggested here should be among the first considered for implementation. Some of the changes could be instituted fairly quickly and without any additional funds; others through the shifting of funds. The tough part comes in relation to those changes which would require additional funds. Here it becomes a question of whether those who dominate educational policy can be convinced, influenced or pressured along the direction suggested.

In 1980, those who formally dominate educational policy are the members of the Board of Education and the Chancellor. Informally, Mayor Edward Koch has become a decisive force in education. The Chancellor is a person selected by him. Through politics he dominates the Board. Mr. Koch has been anxious to exercise greater control over education in order to fulfill his election pledge to improve the quality of education. He appears not to have succeeded: in December 1979, latest reading scores

were reported to have gone down below their previous poor levels. The Mayor has blamed teachers, principals and parents for the shortcomings of public education. (In contrast, the material in this paper indicates it is the system, dominated by the Mayor, which impedes teachers, principals and parents from doing a better educational job.)

Education in New York City in early 1980 continues to be weakened by the failure of the Central Board of Education and the Chancellor to come up with a comprehensive plan or approach for improving education. City Council President Carol Bellamy (N.Y. Times. January 20, 1980) has criticized the Board of Education for lack of clear cut goals and unclarity about priorities. She contends this unclarity may have caused larger cuts in the proposed 1980-81 city budget than might have otherwise occurred.

While not denying that money is tight in the city, the inference of Ms. Bellamy's allegations (regardless of whether the allegations are or aren't so) is that the educational budget becomes more and more vulnerable without solid plans or proposals to improve education. Carrying this logic further, and in a way turning it around somewhat, I would suggest that given this reported relationship between education goals and budget, that it might not be impossible to obtain additional funds for a logical proposal to improve education in New York City. I would suggest further that the idea that classroom teachers' need an adequate support system for significant improvement in education constitutes such a logical proposal and that it therefore deserves serious consideration by those who make educational policy and those who can influence educational policy.

Connecting Research and Observations

The findings in this case substantiate, in some degree, other writings and research which deal with connected topics such as staff development, in-service training and general problems of educational reform.

In 1974, Harold Howe, former U.S. Commissioner of Education, warned that education would "stand still" unless the skills, knowledge and effectiveness of teachers were steadily improved.[10] To bring this about, he stressed the need for each school and school district to have a built-in system for staff development "which must address the persistent problems that individual teachers have in their classrooms." As has been pointed out, far from "standing still," New York City schools have regressed.

In 1975 and 1976, the Teacher Corps interviewd 1,200 persons involved in education in various parts of the country on what they thought of teacher in-service education in this country; less than 20% said they were satisfied.[11] These responses came from the teachers, school administrators, professors of education, teacher organization representatives, and over 100 community people involved in education. Stressed by those interviewed was the need for Inservice Teacher Education to focus on the problems faced by the teacher in the classroom, and to be conducted closer to the site of the classroom. The interviewees also agreed that the most common ISTE activities, conferences and workshops, didn't do much for improving teacher effectiveness. A subsection of those interviewed, some 200 educational policy-makers, stressed that reform in education "will depend tremendously on the education of the

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[10] N.Y. Times, May 4, 1974.

[11] See Bruce R. Joyce, Kathleeen M. McNair, Richard Diaz, with Floyd D. Waterman and Michael G. Baker, Interviews; Perceptions of Professionals and Policy Makers. Report II of the Inservice Teacher Education Concepts Project, National Center for Education Statistics and Teacher Corps, Palo Alto, Calif., 1976.

inservice teacher." At the same time they were reported as generally agreeing that the ISTE in the nation's schools is not efficient, effective or popular.

In 1977, Harvard educational historian, Prof. Joseph Featherstone, writing just after the last presidential election, stated that the most challenging task of the incoming Carter administration "will be to find a way of helping education where it matters most: teachers and students in the classroom."[12] Featherstone proceeded to point out the key failing of many of the educational reforms attempted since the mid-sixties: "Schemes that bypass the key practitioners in schools--teachers and principals--are bound to be futile."

In 1979, Public Education Association director David Seeley declared, as quoted above, that finding ways to provide more assistance to classroom teachers "is one of the great hidden issues in American education."

The final words in this paper are left to ex-Harlem principal Elliott Shapiro, a legend in his time, as a humanist educator. In talking about getting only superior teachers in his school, Shapiro made this comment:

> But the human race being what it is, it's impossible to get that many superior teachers, just as it's impossible to find that many superior doctors, psychiatrists and engineers. Therefore we have to make conditions for teaching so good that the average teacher can become effective.[13]

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[12]"Reschooling Society," New Republic, Jan. 22, 1977.

[13]Nat Hentoff, Our Children Are Dying, Viking Press, New York, 1967, p. 33.

## APPENDIX I

## VISION PROBLEMS IN NEW YORK CITY ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

In New York City, thousands upon thousands of children sit in the classroom and are unable to see what the teacher is writing on the board, and many have trouble reading, because of poor eyesight. This is a situation which has existed in the city public schools for years, and continues to exist.

Here is a not uncommon example described by one of our professionals:

> A ten-year-old was referred to me as having a severe reading problem. He was in the fourth grade and reading at a second grade level. I thought I detected a vision problem and had him checked by an eye doctor. Sure enough, glasses were prescribed, and the child got glasses. On entering the classroom and looking around, he said: "Oh, is that how things are supposed to look." After he got the glasses he quickly improved in reading.

This is not to say that every child with reading problems has a vision problem but the connection is obvious.

Our professionals said that they observed children with unattended vision problems in many of the classes they visited. One said she had been in a school in a low socio-economic area and checked an entire class of 30. She found that 20%--6 out of 30--of the children had poor eye-sight. All of the professionals said a 20% figure was moderate.

These observations led to a search for possible substantiating data. Two professors in the vision field who had done work in public schools were interviewed: Dr. Stuart Podell, Chief of Primary Care, State University of New York College of Optometry; and Dr. Aran Safir, chief of one of the units in the department of Ophthalmology, Mount Sinai School of Medicine.

Dr. Podell, whose current work includes eye examinations in schools, gave this overview of eye-sight problems amongst New York public school children:

> There is a very significant proportion of the public school population who have vision problems which have not been identified. There is no question these vision problems hinder many of these children academically.*

He cited specific figures from a 1976-77 vision study, which he directed, involving 2,494 pupils who have been identified by 17 public schools in Manhattan as having severe learning problems. "More than 40% of the children were found with serious enough eye-sight problems to warrant getting eye glasses or other vision help," he said.

The vision problem of one child, with inflammation of the optic nerve, required other help. Further checking led to the discovery that the child had meningitis.

A specific breakdown of the vision problems found in the 2,494 pupils in the Podell study is as follows. The figures given below overlap, thus no precise overall percentage can be given other than Dr. Podell's estimate of "over 40%." Dr. Podell explained that of the 2,494 pupils:

> 786--31.5% were found to have problems in visual acuity and needed glasses. They were nearsighted, farsighted, or astigmatic.
>
> 475--19% of the total--had problems in the binocular skills area. Some were cross-eyed; others were wall-eyed. They needed vision training if they were to see properly.
>
> 806--32.2% of the total had problems in the area of visual-perceptual skills, which Dr. Podell described as problems of visual-motor integration. These are problems in the brain-vision areas in relation to shapes and the ability to copy forms, and in visual memory amongst other things. "Children with these vision problems can't keep up with their classmates. It's like putting a second grader in a fifth grade class and expecting him to keep up." These children require remediation.
>
> 475--19% of the total--had binocular problems (problems of eye coordination). They required visual training.
>
> 71--2.8% of the total tested--had problems in the area of ocular pathology. This involves mild things like pink eye to more severe problems like the child who had inflammation of the optic nerve, found later to have been caused by meningitis. That child recovered, but she could have gotten much worse if it hadn't been discovered in time.

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*Interview July 13, 1979.

The 786 children in the Podell study of 17 schools were only part of the population of those schools who had been selected as having severe learning problems.

Dr. Podell emphasized that some particularly bright children have vision problems which make them appear to be slow learners, which they are not.

## An Estimated 36,000 Pupils with Serious Vision Problems

Dr. Safir's studies, made in the early 1970's, permit an estimate to be made that during the school year 1978-79 there were over 36,000 elementary school pupils with serious vision problems.

In one study, Dr. Safir's unit vision-screened pupils in P.S. 109, located in East Harlem, a poor area of the city. While 234 were referred to ophthalmologists, only 90 went. For these 90, 52--or 11.6% of the entire school population of 440--mostly Blacks and Puerto Ricans, glasses were prescribed.*

In another Safir study of a parochial school in East Harlem, the St. Francis de Sales Grade School, he found that 20.6% of the children screened had vision problems in both eyes.

Specifics of this study showed the following regarding the 372 students screened:

49 given new glasses
34 were wearing glasses, but the old prescription was inadequate
83 = 22.3% of 372

Of the additional 54 wearing glasses, 28 pupils didn't need them.

Dr. Safir found lower figures, though not insignificant, in a Queens school in an upper-middle-class neighborhood (P.S. 2), with 636 mostly white pupils. In this school, 7.5% of the children were found with previously undetected vision problems.

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*All of Dr. Safir's figures cited here were obtained in an interview with him on June 13, 1979.

Problems of Providing Adequate Services

The vision problems in the schools, our professionals report, involve the following:

1. Inadequate screening of children in school. Mostly teachers do the screening now and both Drs. Podell and Safir say that what is needed are people who are better trained to do this. They possibly could be school personnel, but this hasn't been sufficiently explored for this report.

2. When vision problems are detected this requires follow-up visits to specialists, optometrists or others, for glasses and other help. This puts a particular burden on the parents, many of whom work. Dr. Safir, whose studies showed many families never followed up on the children's detected vision problems, makes the simple suggestion that "the most effective way to insure that the children needing eye glasses receive them is to dispense the eyeglasses at the school, at the time of the examination."* This measure deserves investigation and may be less costly than remediation programs brought on by unattended vision problems.

Our professionals made some observations in relation to vision funds. The poor, they say, may have medicaid to pay for vision services, although many get ripped off by inadequate eye examinations in medicaid mills. (Recall Dr. Safir's figures on the relatively large number of children with glasses who didn't need them.) It is the low-paid workers, blue-collar workers and the lower-middle class who have difficulty. Many do not have medical plans that cover payment for vision problems.

Estimating Vision Problems in Elementary Schools

I have estimated that during the school year 1978-79, only 36,000 children had serious vision problems. I have used a round figure of 10% of serious

* Aran Safir, et al., "A New Method of Vision Care Delivery," Health Services Reports, May 1973, p. 414.

vision problems for poorer pupils--those who receive free lunches. Dr. Safir prescribed glasses for 11.6% of pupils in one school (low-income families); and a round figure of 5% for pupils from more affluent families (no free lunches). (Dr. Safir found 7.5% of the children in one such school with previously undetected vision problems.) This "rounding out" was done arbitrarily in an attempt to be as conservative as possible. I avoided using the much higher percentages reported by our group of six professionals, which although believable, would require too much research to validate or invalidate.

The figures on low income families are based on the 55.7%* of public school pupils in October 1978 who received free lunches, based on reported family incomes of less than $8,940. This percentage, 55.7% of a total of 466,321 elementary school pupils registered in school year 1978-79,* amounts to 259,740 pupils. 10% of that number amounts to 25,9704.

The remaining 44.3%, pupils who do not receive free lunches--families with incomes $8,940 and over--total 206,581. Five percent of that figure totals 10,329 pupils.

The total, of 25,970 in Group I (Free lunch group) and 10,329 in Group II (No free lunches) adds to 36,303 pupils conservatively estimated to have serious vision problems.

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*Official figures provided by the New York City Board of Education.